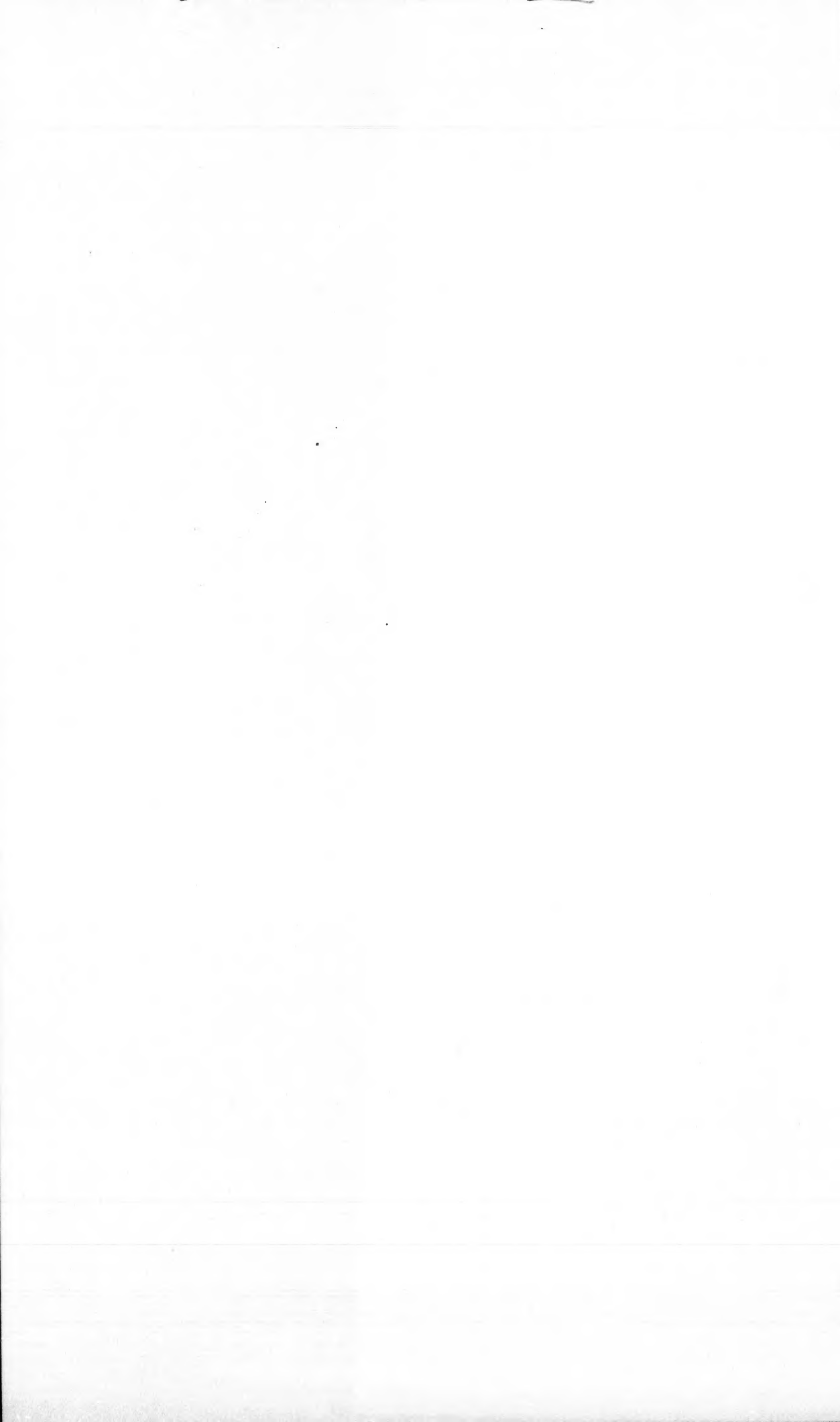






NOTES
ON
THE LIFE OF
DR. JOSEPH WORKMAN

by 
[BOYLE, DAVID]



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Dr. Joseph Workman.

By David Boyle.

READ BEFORE THE CANADIAN INSTITUTE, 21ST APRIL, 1894.



IN the death of Dr. Joseph Workman,* the Canadian Institute has lost one of its most distinguished members, and medical science one of its brightest ornaments, in his specialty as an alienist and neurologist.

He was born on the 26th of May, 1805, within a short distance of Lisburn, county of Antrim, Ireland. A somewhat remote ancestor of his was the Rev. William Workman, of St. Stephen's Church, in the ancient city of Gloucester, England. This gentleman having publicly made known his opposition to what are now-a-days known as High Church practices was "silenced" by the celebrated Archbishop Laud, and this virtual deposition from the holy office was sufficiently wide in its effects to prevent its subject from earning a livelihood even as a pedagogue. His son William became a Roundhead, and entered Ireland with a company of Cromwell's Ironsides. At the close of the warfare he received a gift of land from the Protector, "for helping him to cut Irish throats at Drogheda and elsewhere," to use the language of Dr. Workman when referring to this event, but finding himself unable to hold his newly acquired property, for reasons that are not far to seek, he relinquished his claims to it, or, to quote again from Dr. Workman, "The land came from the Devil and it went back to him."

Joseph Workman the father, and Benjamin Workman the uncle of the doctor, came to Philadelphia shortly after the

* Died in Toronto, April 15th, 1894, in his eighty-ninth year.

close of the American War of Independence. Here they were made acquainted with Benjamin Franklin who was then in the zenith of his fame. Both of the young men were teachers and secured positions in the college that afterwards became the University of Pennsylvania, Joseph as English, and Benjamin as mathematical master. About 1790 the latter published a geography which for many years maintained a high reputation in the schools of the United States. Returning to Ireland after a three years' residence in America the doctor's father married Catharine Goudie, or Gowdie, who belonged to a family from Ayrshire, Scotland. For his mother (who died at the age of 102) the doctor entertained peculiarly affectionate recollections, and invariably spoke of her as his "best and dearest friend." Their family consisted of eight sons and one daughter. Joseph, our doctor, was the fourth son. His early opportunities of receiving an education were not of the best. For some time he attended a school taught by his brother Benjamin at Mullacarten, three Irish, or nearly four English, miles from Lisburn, and this distance he used to say he "walked, in all kinds of weather, and thought nothing of it." Afterwards he was sent for a time to a school kept by a Mr. Charles Shields, in Lisburn, and last of all to the academy of Benj. Neely and Son in the same town. It is quite evident that he made good use of his time at these modest institutions of learning for in 1826, when only a little over twenty-one years of age he was appointed to a responsible position on the Ordnance Survey of Ireland, where he continued to be employed for three years, a period that he always regarded as having afforded him the best part of his education. Preceded by five brothers, the rest of the Workman family, including the subject of this sketch, came to Canada in 1829, arriving in Quebec on the 15th day of May, after a fairly rapid passage of five weeks. For some time his eldest brother Benjamin had been conducting the Union School in Montreal, but on the arrival of the family from Ireland he retired from this charge, which was entered upon by the two brothers Joseph and Alexander, the former teaching English, classics and mathematics. During the five

years they continued to be so engaged, Joseph attended medical lectures, frequented the general hospital, and received private instruction from Dr. John Stephenson, of whom he always spoke in high terms, sometimes referring to him as "a warm-hearted, impetuous man." He graduated in McGill University, as M.D., in 1835. He was an active worker during the two fearful out-breaks of cholera which afflicted Montreal during these years, when so frightful was the mortality that not fewer than 3,000 died on the first occasion, out of a total population of 30,000! At that time he was one of the few medical men who claimed that the disease was a contagious one.

In Montreal, Dr. Workman married Miss Elizabeth Wasnidge, of Sheffield, Yorkshire, in 1835, by whom he had a family of seven sons and three daughters, of whom three sons and two daughters survive both parents.

On coming to Toronto in 1836 he became engaged as a hardware merchant, succeeding his brother-in-law, Mr. W. Wasnidge, who died suddenly as the result of an accident. For some time afterwards the firm was known as that of Workman Brothers, his brother Samuel having become a partner. Their place of business was on King St., opposite St. James' Cathedral. Without any liking for commercial life, and having, all the time he was so engaged, kept up his professional reading, besides being an active member of the Medical Society, he retired from business in 1846 and betook himself to professional practice. He was soon appointed to the chair of Obstetrics and Therapeutics under Dr. Rolph in Toronto School of Medicine, and there are yet living scores of doctors, well advanced in years, who recall with pleasure the lectures delivered by Dr. Workman in those early days.

On the retirement of Dr. Scott from the superintendency of the Toronto Asylum for the Insane, the Hon. Dr. Rolph, then a cabinet minister, came from Quebec to beg that Dr. Workman would assume charge of the institution until a permanent appointment could be made. Dr. Workman agreed to do so, and was himself permanently appointed on the 1st

of July, 1853. He continued to hold this position until July 19th, 1875, a period of twenty-two years, and one which might have been lengthened by half as many more at least had he cared to remain.

As an authority on brain affections he stood in the front rank, and was frequently referred to by European and American professional journals as the "Nestor among students of mental disease." He was one of the first among those in charge of the insane to suggest and adopt modern and humane methods of treatment, but while kind and tender-hearted as a child to his patients, he was nevertheless opposed to the indiscriminate freedom allowed by some superintendents to those under their care.

Although he never attempted the *role* of an author, so far as book-making was concerned, he wrote many valuable original papers for professional journals in Canada and the United States.

During some of the earlier years of his residence in Toronto he took an active part in political controversy, and was the chief editorial writer for one of the newspapers. He had an excellent command of English, which he could and did use with striking effect in the furtherance of views he advocated, or in the demolition of arguments employed by his opponents.

As a linguist, Dr. Workman had few equals. In addition to his knowledge of the classics, he was more or less familiar with Scotch, Welsh and Irish Gaelic; German, Danish, French, Italian, and Spanish, and translation from these to English was a favorite occupation with him for many years, especially after he resigned his superintendency of the asylum, for so conscientious was he in the discharge of his duties, that he allowed nothing to withdraw his attention for a moment from the care of his numerous patients, and the general oversight of the institution.

His translations were chiefly on medical subjects, more particularly on diseases of the brain, and they appeared from time to time in the best American and Canadian professional magazines.

For fully half a century he was a close observer of meteorological phenomena, and as many of his notes were made daily for a long time before the establishment of an observatory in this city, they form a valuable record. The late Henry G. Vennor made a very liberal use of these notes in his study of Canadian weather.

The public school system of Ontario had no warmer friend than he. About 1841, when trustees were first appointed by government, those who were selected for St. Lawrence ward were Dr. Joseph Workman, Dr. Widmer, and Mr. Wm. Cawthra. He took a very active part in the establishment and management of the pioneer schools, and remained in office until the trustees were made elective, when he became the first chairman of the Toronto Board, a position he held for three or four years, and it is worthy of note that, from the outset, he fought vigorously against all attempts on the part of a good many influential rate-payers to introduce religious teaching, claiming as he did that such a course would inevitably lead to a general demand for sectarian schools.

Dr. Workman had his full share of professional honors, and few men deserved them better. He was president of the Medical Association of Canada, of the Ontario Medical Association (of which he was one of the founders), and for several years he presided over the Medical Society of Toronto, in whose rooms there hangs a fine oil-painted portrait of the doctor, a tribute to his worth, from a few of his friends.

He was an honorary member of the Italian Societa Freniatria, and of other similar bodies in various European countries, but the highest possible acknowledgement was paid to his professional attainments when he was elected to an honorary membership in the Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain, an honor which no one in America, and few anywhere else out of Britain had received at that time.

As a man it may be truly said of him in the words of his countryman, Goldsmith, that "even his failings leaned to virtue's side." He was very fond of children, and took

great pleasure in the company of grown-up young people, unless he detected in any of the latter a tendency to self-assertion or dandyism, qualities to which his aversion was very marked. His attachments were strong, and he would neither say himself, nor permit others to say in his hearing, a word against those who were on his list of friends. He had few enemies, and perhaps no man so long in public life was ever more generally respected.

Modesty was one of his most characteristic qualities—he made no pretensions to encyclopædic knowledge—never hesitated to confess his ignorance, and was in this respect a model for many—for many, indeed, not half so well informed.

A most remarkable feature was his disposition to accept and adopt new, if apparently well-founded, scientific and theological theories, even long after he was in the “sere and yellow leaf.” In the light of modern discovery he had no respect for moss-grown beliefs.

His memory was a marvellously retentive one. Names, facts, incidents and dates it may truly be said he had at his fingers’ ends by the thousand. Poetry he could quote extensively, even to within a few minutes of his death, his favorite authors being Shakespeare, Moore, Burns and Pope. Only an hour or so before he died he assisted in completing a quotation from Scotia’s bard, which had been commenced by one of the two last friends who saw him alive.

As a parent, physician, scholar, gentleman, and friend he will be sadly missed by the surviving members of his family, and by all whose privilege it was to have formed his acquaintance.

It would be easy to write much in praise of the late Dr. Joseph Workman, though contrary to all his well-known tastes and wishes, but this may be safely said, and to this, he himself, were he living, would take no exception, any more than he would claim a particle of credit for the fact, namely, that throughout a long life-time, acting in many capacities, both private and public, *he strove to do his duty*, and he invariably did it well.

